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*THE DEATH OF EZEKIEL'S WIFE.*

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THREE SERMONS

PREACHED AT

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BRIGHTON,

BY

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LONDON:

THOMAS BOSWORTH, 215, REGENT STREET.

1866.

100.3.180.



## THE DEATH OF EZEKIEL'S WIFE.

"Also the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, 'Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down. Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men.' So I spake unto the people in the morning: and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded."

*Ezekiel* ~~xiv~~ <sup>iv</sup>. 15-18.

### I.

**A** FORTRESS is no stronger than its weakest point. It is on this assailable place of the stronghold of life that the visitations of Almighty God fall, as well as the permitted assaults of Satan.

We have a remarkable illustration of this in the life of the Prophet Ezekiel. The holy discipline of his varied existence made him a sign to others, whilst it helped him on the chastened "way that leadeth unto life."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S. Matthew vii. 14.

Ezekiel was a young priest of the Temple at Jerusalem when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came against the city. The invasion ended in the captivity of Jehoiachin the king of Judah, and in an immense<sup>1</sup> transmigration of the flower of the nation to the land of the Chaldeans. Here Ezekiel married ~~one~~ of his own people, and but for the deprivation of the temple-service and the sense of exile, the river of his life ~~meandered~~ through a delightful land. A priest deprived of his office—a Hebrew, in whom nationality is a passion, wrenched from his country; what was left for him, a man without a career, but to seek for balm in the Gilead of acquiescence to the will of God and in the cultivation of the Eden of domestic affection? For five years calmly flowed on the stream of a blameless, and, we doubt not, a happy life; when by the river of Chebar the heavens were opened, and Ezekiel saw visions of God.<sup>2</sup> Man had deprived him of the functions of a priest, God gave him the mantle of a prophet. Man ~~tore~~ him from the temple's "Beautiful Gate," and from his fatherland. God opened unto him the gate of heaven, and showed him "the land that is very far off,"<sup>3</sup> tenanted by its<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings xxiv. 15

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah xxxiii. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel i. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ezekiel i. 5-22.



living creatures under the firmament of the terrible crystal. Henceforth he is the mouth-piece of God to the children of Israel. He has received the charge, and eaten the honey-sweet roll of prophetic power,<sup>1</sup> and at once enters upon his office.

It will be evident that in **his** character would be two very tender points. His education from boyhood ~~for~~ the Jewish priesthood would render him sensitively alive to any ceremonial irregularity or uncleanness; whilst the fact of being without a country or career would naturally make all the interest of his life centre in his wife. Hence is it that we find this, the sternest and most mystical of the prophets, this man who spake out of the whirlwind of the wrath of God, making mention of his wife in the "still small voice" of human affection and emotion, as "the Desire of his eyes." On these two sensitive parts of his character the Hand of God touched him in the performance of his office.

Not only was Ezekiel to prophesy **in** words to the children of the captivity, but he was to be a sign unto them in his own person. He tells them of their rejection by God by reason of their idolatry,<sup>2</sup> the nature of the judgment,<sup>3</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel iii. 1-3.

<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel viii.

<sup>3</sup> Ezekiel xx-xxiii.

the sins which called it down upon them. Jerusalem must be destroyed. They need not dream of return thither.

To render this more impressive, the prophet, by the command of God, puts before the people prophetic parables in action. He exhibits a representation of the siege of Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> He lies<sup>2</sup> on his side, as sinking to the ground under the weight of Israel's sin. He<sup>3</sup> eats bread by weight and measure, as showing the straitness of the famine. He<sup>4</sup> shaves off and weighs in balances the hair of his head, typifying in three locks thereof, God's three judgments on Jerusalem, by famine, the sword, and dispersion. He holds aloft the chain of captivity.<sup>5</sup> He<sup>6</sup> depicts the flight and the panic of the besieged, by removing his furniture and digging through the wall of his house by day, in the sight of the people, and by eating bread and drinking water in their presence with trembling and carefulness. The prophecy in action at length received its catastrophe in the death of his wife,<sup>7</sup> for whom Ezekiel is absolutely forbidden to shed one single tear.

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<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel iv. 2, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel iv. 5, 6.

<sup>3</sup> Ezekiel iv. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Ezekiel v. 1-12.

<sup>5</sup> Ezekiel vii. 23.

<sup>6</sup> Ezekiel xii. 3, 5, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Ezekiel xxiv. 16, 17.

Now in this protracted discipline of personal symbolism, we see the perfect obedience of the prophet is only interrupted by two evidences of human anguish. The priest's dread of and remonstrance against ceremonial uncleanness is recorded in the fourth chapter,<sup>1</sup> and the touching pathos with which he tells us how "the Desire of his eyes" was taken from him by a sudden stroke.

II. The death of Ezekiel's wife is at once the most singular and the most distressing of the death-beds of the Bible.

The prophetic office and the terrible visions of Ezekiel must have been as "a great gulf fixed" between him and ordinary human life, but a help-meet for him had been given him, the one link between him and his kind, around whom the tendrils of human affection could twine which could find no other thing to cling to. In proportion to his isolation from others would be his love for her, "the Desire of his eyes."

Oh! bitter must have sounded the Voice of the Lord walking in the Eden of home, and announcing to him, in words unexpected and appalling, its imminent and exemplary desolation. "Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the Desire of thine eyes with a stroke: yet neither

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<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel iv. 14.

shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down. Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men."<sup>1</sup>

Scripture tells us not how the rest of the day was passed after this terrible message, which must have been an unutterable trial to Ezekiel to communicate to the poor victim about to be offered up on the altar of prophecy. I use the word "victim" with a special purpose, because I doubt not that the Prophet pointed out to his wife, that as her death was to be a symbol of warning to Israel, she was in some sort a victim and sacrifice. This thought would reconcile her to her fate, (for the notion of self-sacrifice, so repugnant to men, is of the very essence of woman's nature,) and she must have felt she was now identified with her husband's prophetic functions, as well as "bone of his bones, and flesh of his flesh," and at once have risen to a higher life. We can well believe, on that breathless, soundless, sultry afternoon, as husband and wife prayed and conversed in their Chaldean house by the river of Chebar, it was she who supported him—the Alcestis of prophecy.

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<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel xxiv. 16, 17.

“ And at even his wife died.”<sup>1</sup>

We will not follow the prophet through “ the horror of great darkness,” “ darkness that might be felt,” of the night that followed. But we may well believe that the God who denied him nature’s privilege and great relief of tears did not withhold the compensating and supernatural dews of His heavenly grace, and amidst the ruins of his home, as between the pieces of Abram’s sacrifice in the plain of Mamre,<sup>2</sup> passed the burning lamp of God, to be “ a lantern unto his feet, and a light unto his paths,”<sup>3</sup> lest he should stumble or be lost in that midnight of mysterious calamity.

When the morning came the tearless seer, clad in the garments of priesthood and prophecy, stood in the presence of the people, not trembling as when he took the bread and the water in the parable, but stately as a marble statue, and as unmoved. He tells them he is a sign unto them; that as he has lost “ the Desire of his eyes,” and can shed no tear, nor wear any garb of woe, so shall it be with them; for Jerusalem, the city of their love, and their countrymen who are left in it, shall be stricken with a similar sudden stroke,

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<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel xxiv. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis xv. 12-17.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm cxix. 105.

and their sorrow shall be tearless, signal, and terrible as his own. "Ezekiel is unto you a sign."

Every tree must be made bare of foliage ere the eyes of those that pass by can detect the likeness of the cross, in which shape it grows. The same stroke which made the seer a sign to the children of the captivity, completed the holy discipline of his life, and disengaged him entirely from the ties of earth. When Ezekiel the priest shrunk with remonstrating abhorrence from ceremonial pollution, Almighty God at once respects his religious scruples, and remits the trial.<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel the man records the loss of his wife with a pathos which tells us how the great sorrow of his life must have been silently pleaded against to the God who knoweth the heart; but in vain,—for this was for his good, as well as needful for the rendering him a sign to the children of Israel, which spake to them of a calamity too agonizing for tears. The national catastrophe foretold by the prophet duly came to pass, eleven years afterwards.

Let us see in what respect Ezekiel is a sign to us.

The tearless prophet, clad in no vesture of

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<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel iv. 15.

mourning, and fulfilling his appointed task whilst "the Desire of his eyes" lay dead in his lonely dwelling, teaches us not only that we must show forth calmness and submission to the will of Almighty God under great calamities, whether public or private, but that our ordinary duties are to be fulfilled as best they may. "The heart knoweth his own bitterness."<sup>1</sup> The prophet's voice might falter as he spake to the people in the morning, as he was commanded. Something might be lacking of the old fierce fervid eloquence, but he did his duty; and "as his days, so was his strength."<sup>2</sup> God never yet failed any man in the path of duty. We all know how the most delightful and genial of the works of a great English writer<sup>3</sup> was written to pay for the funeral expenses of a mother.

Such sudden strokes (for every sorrow, however looked for, seems sudden when it really comes,) are sometimes judicial, sometimes not; always sent in love. However, the blow is sure to fall, as of old, on something very dear to us,— "the excellency of our strength," "the Desire of our eyes," "that whereupon we set our minds," "our sons and our daughters." Say, we stand

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<sup>1</sup> Prov. xiv. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. xxxiii. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Johnson's "Rasselas."

upon one of the many peaks of the Alps of life. It took years of climbing to get there,—the heat by day, the frost by night, we willingly endured,—never swerved from our purpose,—and at last we can proudly survey the promised land of success. As of old by the Son of Man, so at our right hand stands Satan with his temptations,—“Worship me.” Wealth is a snare; and to be spoken well of all men, our divine Lord called a woe;<sup>1</sup> so we forget God and take Satan at his word.

Now, man's idea of an appropriate judgment would be the dizzied brain, the paralyzed limb, and the headlong fall into the abyss. Well, that has happened; for “riches make themselves wings”<sup>2</sup> occasionally. But most usually the landscape is suddenly darkened by the clouds of sickness or death. “God turns His face from us, and we are troubled.” Some disease may make us eat bread in the bitterness of our soul without pleasure.<sup>3</sup> The son or daughter on whom we have set our minds may pass within the veil, whilst our own sun stands still upon Gibeon in obstinate mid-day splendour, and will *not* go down whilst it is yet day. How we impiously wish it would! Some young child may be

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<sup>1</sup> Luke vi. 26.    <sup>2</sup> Prov. xxiii. 5.    <sup>3</sup> Job xxi. 25.



stretched on the couch of pain, and how bitter is life only a parent knows, when one poor little face, with fixed, painful, beseeching look, ever moves between us and God's sunshine.

Again ; how desolate is the landscape, though it be in beauty like the garden of God, if the "Desire of our eyes," is taken from us. In such hours, what is it to have secured the whole world, if we have lost the capacity of enjoying it, by reason of our great sorrow. But, my brother, by that loss you have saved your soul alive. The stroke which has fallen upon son or daughter, or the Desire of your eyes, or the excellency of your strength, has made you say, "I would not live alway ;"<sup>1</sup> and I will trust, likewise, "the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord."<sup>2</sup> Affliction draws us nearer to our God, and detaches us from a world it is death to love, and not only helps us forward on the way that leadeth unto everlasting life, but also enables us to afford the noble spectacle of Christian resignation to our friends and acquaintance, to help them in their own great sorrows.

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<sup>1</sup> Job vii. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Job i. 21.

## II.

### THE DEATH OF EZEKIEL'S WIFE.

“Ezekiel is unto you a sign.”—*Ezekiel* xxiv. 24.

**I**N my last sermon on the death of Ezekiel's wife, I endeavoured to show how the prophet was a sign unto us with reference to the calamities and afflictions of life. We will now treat the incident in another method of exposition.

I. Ezekiel and his wife represent to us the marriage of the natural and spiritual life—the union of nature and of grace.

Of the prophet himself you can form a very distinct idea. In the mirror of your imagination is reflected “the express image of his person;” but read that twenty-fourth chapter, and look at it through the most powerful lens that vivifying and creative imagination can supply, and no human form will cross the field of vision. You can *not* call up the figure of Ezekiel's wife. She seems impalpable, a something spiritual and formless, rather than “bone of his bones, and flesh of

his flesh." No words can have a more touching pathos, or breathe more of deep attachment, than "the Desire of his eyes," as applied to a living person, or to an object of affection removed from us. But when all that is recorded of such an one is summed up in that single phrase, (however beautiful in itself,) "the Desire of his eyes," the reader can form no idea whatever of what manner of man or woman was the object of so much love. The name of Ezekiel's wife is not even mentioned. She is something less than thin shade or impassible shadow. Of Eve we can form some notion, of the prophet's wife none. "The Desire of his eyes" is about as bodiless an abstraction for us as what is technically called "a love of souls." It will not, therefore, I think, be either a fanciful or a forced interpretation if we regard Ezekiel's wife as a representation of "the spirit of a man" in which has been breathed the supernatural breath of divine grace.

This marvellous humanity of ours consists of "spirit, and soul, and body."<sup>1</sup> The spirit is the immortal entity (which in common parlance we usually call our soul), of which we can form about the same idea as we do about a geometrical point, which "hath no parts, and which hath no mag-

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Thess. v. 23.

nitude." The soul is the mysterious principle of animal life. The visible body is the temple, illuminated by the animal soul, in whose inner shrine dwells the impassible and rational spirit. The spirit is the seat of mental intelligence, and the union of the spirit with the bodily brain results in what we call mind, and it seems exactly as if "our body thought,"<sup>1</sup> for the mind is entirely at its mercy, and shares its fragility. Now on this spirit is grafted the divine grace, which gift, equally with the mind, may be lost through the medium of the body, and reasonably so, for spirit, soul, and body form one constitution—man. This spirit, though impassible and invisible and formless, is "the Desire of our eyes," because at the resurrection, when we shall "rise with our bodies," it will be the source of human identity, and also contains the mysterious and divine principle of grace, which will unite the man with his magnificent threefold constitution to Christ for ever.

In another world our divine Lord has said that "they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven."<sup>2</sup>

They, who on earth were one flesh, are now submitted to a sublimating process. They are

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<sup>1</sup> Dryden.

<sup>2</sup> S. Matthew xxii. 36.

now raised with spiritual bodies, though with flesh and bones, like that of our blessed Lord's glorified body;<sup>1</sup> and all that was of "the earth earthy"<sup>2</sup> in their condition here will have been left in the charnel-house with all of their remains which were really mortal. In like manner will the wedlock of spirit and body be transfigured for an existence under new conditions. The workings of the spirit will be, as on earth, manifested through its connection and contact with the body; but the body of the resurrection, with its animal soul now exalted into a pure principle of life: and hence will result not a carnal, but a spiritual mind. It is evident, then, that in this dispensation of eternal glory, only such ties and recollections of earth will survive and be permitted as are not of a disturbing nature. The hypothetical woman of the Sadducees,<sup>3</sup> with her seven husbands, was to be in the resurrection as an angel of God, with a merciful forgetfulness of those relations, which earthly experience shows are, by a wise Providence, allowed to be replaced and practically forgotten, even in this mortal life.

In like manner the prodigal son<sup>4</sup> will have no

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<sup>1</sup> S. Luke xxiv. 39.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 47.

<sup>3</sup> S. Matt. xxii. 25.

<sup>4</sup> S. Luke xv.

remembrance of transgressions, which his Heavenly Father will not so much as mention to him.<sup>1</sup> Nor will "the woman in the city who was a sinner" retain any memory of the old sinful time, and probably not even of the incident in the house of Simon.<sup>2</sup>

Our own experience both in temporal and spiritual matters is a strong corroboration of this. We recover from a grievous sickness, we remember that we have been ill, but it is only by an effort that we can recall all the circumstances of our sickness. It is Nature's instinct that we should forget them; a mental recurrence to the sick-room would be like a spectre in the restored daylight of health.

Again; look how we reconstruct our fortunes, or our homes. The memories of past misfortune or affliction are mercifully laid asleep, and rarely wake, save when the mind falls into a nervous, morbid, abnormal state. So it is in spiritual matters. A sin may be confessed, and Almighty God may have pardoned the sinner; the sin, I know, "may be ever before you,"<sup>3</sup> so far as your ever feeling yourself the chiefest of forgiven sinners is concerned, although the sin itself shall

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<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel xviii. 22.

<sup>2</sup> S. Luke vii. 37-50.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm li. 3.

be as though it had not been as it affects your soul in the day of judgment. Now, any wise physician of souls would peremptorily forbid your dwelling on the sin in question, or any of its details and particulars which possess an unhealthy fascination. The pardoned sinner will have his sin ever before him in a profound sense of his own unworthiness and self-abasement; whilst the sin itself will lie, "without form and void,"<sup>1</sup> in the grave of "the old man," never to come back from the dead.

From these instances of our experience in our mortal state, our finite reason may in some degree realize how the power of God will, in the resurrection, sift the particles of earth from the pure gold of the spiritual bodies of the righteous, "when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality."<sup>2</sup>

II. Brethren, as the Desire of Ezekiel's eyes was taken away from him with a stroke, so by one single blow of the flail of mortal sin may the spirit be killed; that is, the spiritual life may be instantly and utterly extinguished in the spirit, which becomes what is called in popular language "a lost soul."

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis i. 2.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 53.

There may be other aspects of the effects of sin more sublime, as, for instance, the thought of how Almighty God loathes it, and how nothing less than the death of God's only-begotten Son upon the cross could make "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world."<sup>1</sup> There may be other aspects of a more unselfish character, as, for example, the misery our sins bring down upon others.

But what view is more appalling than that which treats of the effects of sin on our own spirit in this world? We can face the idea of being a lost soul hereafter, just as we can confront the sentence, "It is appointed unto men once to die."<sup>2</sup> It is future. The Present is our own. But how terrible if we are told, as we supposed, in the very flush and vigour of health and strength, that the sentence of death which we all bear about us must be carried out in a few hours; and how dreadful the thought that when God says to us, "Thou fool! this night thy soul shall be required of thee!"<sup>3</sup> it is a dead spirit that will return to the God who gave it! It is this view

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<sup>1</sup> *Prayer of Consecration*.—"Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion."

<sup>2</sup> Heb. ix. 27.

<sup>3</sup> S. Luke xii. 20.



of sin that I would press upon you to-night—the instantaneous and complete death one single mortal sin brings upon the principle of spiritual life in the spirit. Who is he who hath not sinned? If the compassions of Christ were to fail us, and we were cut off in our sin, without time for repentance towards God and amendment of life—that test of penitence, “as the tree falls so it must lie,” though Noah, Daniel, and Job<sup>1</sup> were to make intercession for our dead spirit, they could not avert the resurrection of damnation. What is murder, or theft, or falsehood, but the movement of the hand or tongue? A muscle set in motion by a thought may lose a soul, if time be not granted for that “godly sorrow which worketh repentance to salvation.”<sup>2</sup> Such may be at any moment the terrible effect of a sudden stroke of mortal sin. My very plainness of speech on this subject may sound like exaggeration. And yet your own experience of a lesser matter—of “a sin that is not unto death”<sup>3</sup>—will bear out all that I have said concerning the fatal effects of deadly sin, from which we pray to be delivered in the Litany. Take a venial sin, to which we are nearly all of us at times subject—that of being

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<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel xiv. 14.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. vii. 10.

<sup>3</sup> 1 S. John v. 16.

out of temper. The very moment we allow ill-temper to take possession of the house of the spirit, we feel such an evil influence come over us, that our guardian angel seems to say to the good dispositions and Christian graces, "Let us depart!" and God's temple of the body seems given over to Satanic possession for a season. They who are in the habit of being out of temper, and they who are the victims of it, will not accuse me of exaggeration in describing the effects of this deplorable failing, which is productive of so much wretchedness in homes that *might* be so happy. If such be the working of a venial sin on our spiritual state, is it possible to overrate the malignant action of a single mortal sin!

How soon may "a sin that is not unto death" transmute itself into a sin which is unto death! Think how Saul, when the evil spirit was on him, hurled the murderous javelin at David.<sup>1</sup> Remember how David made not "a covenant with his eye,"<sup>2</sup> and how he thereby fell into the sins of adultery, labyrinthine hypocrisy, and treacherous murder.<sup>3</sup> His instant and total moral deterioration is remarkable. The lion-hearted, royal-minded man descends to a vile ingenuity that was

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Samuel xix. 9, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Job xxxi. 1.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Samuel xi. 2. 4. 8, 9, 10. 15. 17.

quite alien to his character, and will wade through blood to reach the shadow of a forfeited morality. And all this "mystery of iniquity" and complication of baseness arose from the light glance of a roving eye!

But David had grace given him to repent and say, "I have sinned against the Lord," Who said to him by Nathan the seer, "The Lord hath put away thy sin: thou shalt not die."<sup>1</sup> Granted even it is so ruled in many cases, what reasonable grounds of confidence can any man have for supposing it will be so with him?

Ezekiel's wife, taken away by a sudden stroke, is a figure of the spirit slain by a mortal sin. Let us for a moment stand with the prophet in "the valley which was full of bones"<sup>2</sup> of "the dead Israelites."<sup>3</sup> We behold in vision "the sinews and the flesh come upon them, and the skin cover them above."<sup>4</sup> Then said the Lord to Ezekiel, "Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." So Ezekiel prophesied as he was commanded, "and the breath came into them,

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Samuel xii. 7. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel xxxvii.

<sup>3</sup> Baruch iii. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Ezekiel xxxvii. 8.

and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army.”<sup>1</sup>

As these children of the resurrection march past us, man, woman, and little child, we know why the prophet’s eye scans the triumphant host with such agony of expectancy—but *she* is not there. The absence of one fair face resolves that great company of noble forms and features into a formless, featureless, undistinguishable crowd. “The Desire of his eyes” shall never return to gladden them again. She is not there—she is *not* risen. Ezekiel sees no resurrection of her who was dearest to him in the valley of dry bones; so there is a time when there is no room for repentance, no opportunity for leading the risen life. Comfort not thyself therefore that the converted will be an exceeding great army. What matters it to thee if they be as the sands of the sea shore for multitude, if thou art not among them?

Let me conclude with a word of necessary warning. Ezekiel, you may remember, spake unto the people in the morning, whilst “the Desire of his eyes” lay dead in his dwelling. In like manner it is quite possible for you to suppose it is well with you because your life, as seen of

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<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel xxxvii. 9, 10.

man, is faultless as an epitaph, when the while all men may be speaking well of a dead spirit—a lost soul. You test sin by the conventional, variable, and arbitrary rule of the world, not by that of the unchanging gospel; so you may fall into some mortal sin which you are pleased to consider “a sin not unto death,” and may “die in your sins.”<sup>1</sup>

How awful is it for any one to be “dead while he liveth;”<sup>2</sup> to perform all the duties of life in an irreproachable way; “to bring up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;”<sup>3</sup> to have about us a form of godliness, which, as it were, preaches to others, whilst we ourselves are cast-aways.

It is the *unnatural* divorce between flesh and blood, and the spirit of a man, that is the startling element of an apparition “from the dead,”<sup>4</sup> which so daunts our humanity. Human nature falls prostrate before the UNNATURAL.

May you too be startled into the dread of unconscious and deadly sin by the operation of the same law. For a more unnatural, and a more fearful sight than any phantom, is the living flesh and blood without the living spirit. He is “twice

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<sup>1</sup> S. John viii. 24.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Tim. v. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Eph. vi. 4.

<sup>4</sup> S. Luke xvi. 31.

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dead"<sup>1</sup> who is forsaken of God the Holy Ghost and separated from the love of Christ. Less terrible the apparition in the witch's cave at Endor than the galvanized corpse of one of "the dead Israelites" slain on Mount Gilboa.<sup>2</sup> "Take heed, therefore, that the light which is in thee be not darkness,"<sup>3</sup> even as our divine Lord hath warned us.

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<sup>1</sup> S. Jude 12.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Samuel xxviii. 14, xxxi. 1.

<sup>3</sup> S. Luke xi. 35.

### III.

## THE DEATH OF EZEKIEL'S WIFE.

“Ezekiel is unto you a sign.”—*Ezekiel* xxiv. 24.

IN our last sermon, brethren, we endeavoured to put before you the terrible effects of sin on the soul in this present world, taking Ezekiel's wife as the type of a soul slain by a sudden stroke of mortal sin. The same mysterious incident shall help us to-night to the final portion of the subject, viz. the effect of sin, in the world that is to come, on our Lord Jesus Christ, with reference to his relation to the soul, which, unlike the younger brother in the parable, “*is dead and was alive.*”<sup>1</sup>

The shadow of the cross falls dark and long upon Ezekiel, as upon all those who, in the Old Testament, have prefigured Christ, and upon all who have specially conformed<sup>2</sup> to His image in the New. “As one star differeth from another

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<sup>1</sup> S. Luke xv. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Romans viii. 29.

star in glory,"<sup>1</sup> so are they all, according to their measure, "partakers of Christ's sufferings."<sup>2</sup> But, so far as I know, Ezekiel presents the solitary type of "the wrath of the Lamb"<sup>3</sup> on that day when Jesus will *not* weep<sup>4</sup> for the dead, but will let the gates of hell close over the lost for ever.

Ezekiel, the "most neglected of the prophets,"<sup>5</sup> is most typical of them all of Him Who was "despised and rejected of men."<sup>6</sup> Every typical action that Ezekiel was commanded to enact before the children of the captivity speaks to us eloquently of some point in the life of Christ. The title of *son of man*, by which the Lord invariably addresses the prophet, gives us at once the clue to the Messianic interpretation, which sees in Ezekiel a type of our blessed Redeemer.

When the prophet exhibits a representation of the siege of Jerusalem,<sup>7</sup> it is not *the stone crying out from the wall, and the beam out of the timber answering it*, but the voice of the Lord as He paced the temple courts, or sat on the slopes of

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 41.

<sup>2</sup> 1 S. Peter iv. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. vi. 16.

<sup>4</sup> S. John xi. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Dr. Wm. Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," Art. Ezekiel, p. 604.

<sup>6</sup> Isaiah liii. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Ezekiel iv. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Habakkuk ii. 10.



Olivet, proclaiming that not one stone of the temple should be left upon another that should not be thrown down;<sup>1</sup> or announcing in prophecy the horrors of the siege of the city by the Roman armies. When Ezekiel shaves off and weighs in balances his hair, keeping some of it affixed to the skirt of his garment as a figure of those who should be left,<sup>2</sup> we are reminded of our blessed Lord's promise to His disciples, "there shall not an hair of your head perish."<sup>3</sup> When we see him eating bread by weight and measure<sup>4</sup> we think of Him "who giveth food to all flesh,"<sup>5</sup> and yet was so poor as to eat the apportioned bread of charity. The prophet lies on the ground<sup>6</sup> with bare outstretched arm, as prostrate under the burden of the iniquity of Israel—Christ in Gethsemane sinks to the ground in His agony, bathed in bloody sweat;<sup>7</sup> and the bared arm on the wet grass was a foretaste of how it would be extended on the cross. "All day long I have stretched forth My hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people."<sup>8</sup> See in the prophet wearing the chain of captivity<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S. Matthew xxiv. 2.<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel v. 3.<sup>3</sup> S. Luke xxi. 18.<sup>4</sup> Ezekiel iv. 9-17.<sup>5</sup> Psalm cxxxvi. 25.<sup>6</sup> Ezekiel iv. 4.<sup>7</sup> S. Luke xxii. 44.<sup>8</sup> Rom. x. 21; Is. lxxv. 2.<sup>9</sup> Ezekiel vii. 23.

Christ bound before Pilate. He brings forth his furniture<sup>1</sup> for removing, and digs through the wall of his house—Christ removes His precious things from the Jewish temple to His Church, for it is written, “in every place incense shall be offered unto the Lord, and a pure offering.”<sup>2</sup> And again, He “hath broken down the middle wall of partition”<sup>3</sup> between Jew and Gentile. Ezekiel eats bread and drinks water in the presence of the people with trembling and carefulness<sup>4</sup>—a sign unto us of how Christ trembles lest we abuse His sacramental gifts—lest having been “born of water and of the Spirit,”<sup>5</sup> we, who were born again, become “twice dead,”<sup>6</sup>—lest, having eaten of “that bread which came down from heaven,”<sup>7</sup> instead of obtaining the great benefit of “the strengthening and refreshing our souls,”<sup>8</sup> we find that the receiving of the holy communion doth nothing else than “increase our damnation,”<sup>9</sup> or haply bring down sore judgments on us for our want of faith in “not discerning the

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<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel xii. 4, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Malachi i. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Ephesians ii. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Ezekiel xi. 18, 19.

<sup>5</sup> S. John iii. 5.

<sup>6</sup> S. Jude 12.

<sup>7</sup> S. John vi. 58.

<sup>8</sup> Church Catechism.

<sup>9</sup> The Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion.

Lord's body,"<sup>1</sup> or peril our souls by never receiving what is "generally necessary to our salvation."<sup>2</sup> For it is written, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you."<sup>3</sup> What a sad pendant to Melchisedec, king and priest of the Most High God, bringing forth bread and wine,<sup>4</sup> is the picture of Ezekiel the prophet holding bread and water in hands trembling, as commanded, with unconscious prophetic power.

I believe I have spoken of all the types which occur, so far as the twenty-fifth chapter, except one, and that is the marriage of the priest-prophet. The wedlock of him who was styled *son of man* among the prophets can be no other than a figure of the bridals of the Son of Man with the soul.

For this divine wedlock Almighty God prepared mankind by familiarizing them with the idea of marriage as between Himself and the chosen people, e. g. "For thy Maker is thy husband; the Lord of Hosts is His name."<sup>5</sup> "Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xi. 29. Quoted in Communion Service.

<sup>2</sup> Church Catechism.

<sup>3</sup> S. John vi. 53.

<sup>4</sup> Genesis xiv. 18, 19.

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah liv. 5.

wentest after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.”<sup>1</sup> “Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you.”<sup>2</sup> “I shall betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know that I am the Lord.”<sup>3</sup> We find that when “in the fulness of time”<sup>4</sup> He came “of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph,”<sup>5</sup> the idea of marriage still continued. It was at a marriage in Cana of Galilee that He wrought His first miracle, and made the water wine;<sup>6</sup> and the most beautiful, and also the most awful of the parables, take a marriage, or a marriage feast, for either their subject or their background. It was therefore no new thing to find the holy apostles speaking of the union of Christ with His Church, and with every single believer, under the figure of wedlock. Almighty God was pleased to speak of His connection with the Jewish Church as if it were a marriage relation. When Christ came, that which had been an emblem became a reality. “Our blessed Lord<sup>7</sup> stands before us dis-

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah ii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah iii. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Hosea ii. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Galatians iv. 4.

<sup>5</sup> S. John i. 4, 5.

<sup>6</sup> S. John ii. 1-11.

<sup>7</sup> This passage, to “relation to Christ” on the following page, is an almost *verbatim* excerpt from Professor Fair-

tinctly revealed as the second Adam. As such, He also must have a help meet for Him. 'We are workers together.'<sup>1</sup> He has it in part now, but shall have it in completeness hereafter, in the company of faithful souls who have been washed from their sins in His blood,—the elect Church, which in all its members grows out of His roots, lives by His life, and is called at once to share in His glory, and as a handmaid to minister to His will, so that the mystery of the primeval spouse, 'bone of Adam's bones, flesh of his flesh,' is called, by apostle and evangelist, the mystery of the Church in relation to Christ." "We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones."<sup>2</sup> Hence it is that the Lord nourisheth and cherisheth His universal Church, and every member of it.<sup>3</sup> This it is that makes the same S. Paul exclaim, "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."<sup>4</sup> This is the burden of the triumphant song in the Apocalypse, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him, for the

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bairn's learned work, entitled, "The Theology of Holy Scripture: viewed in Connection with the whole Series of Divine Dispensations." Fourth edition. Vol. i. ch. v. pp. 305, 6.

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. vi. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Eph. v. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Eph. v. 29.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Cor. xi. 2.

marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.”<sup>1</sup> And John “saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”<sup>2</sup>

Now this is the precise relation in which every one of you who has been baptized, man, woman, and little child, stands to our divine Lord. You can realize this in the case of the union between Christ and any given faithful soul, but not as between Christ and all professing Christians. Yet every one of you, from the one full of faith and its fruit, good works,<sup>3</sup> to the one who is living without God in the world, has been wedded to Christ, “has put on Christ,”<sup>4</sup> and holds the title-deeds of salvation, for “Baptism doth save.”<sup>5</sup> “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”<sup>6</sup> Before you make those words of S. Peter and of S. Paul your own, “Consider your ways,”<sup>6</sup> O careless Christian. You who can talk glibly enough about “the doctrine of baptisms and of laying on of hands,”<sup>7</sup> and of your mystical espousals with Christ, it may be the divine marriage between you and the Lamb is dissolved; it may

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation xix. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Revelation xxi. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Galatians iii. 27.

<sup>4</sup> 1 S. Peter iii. 21.

<sup>5</sup> Romans viii. 35.

<sup>6</sup> Haggai i. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Hebrews vi. 2.

be you bear a name you have no right to bear; it may be your sacramental wedlock is null and void, and you are no more "a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven,"<sup>1</sup> than you are a diademed elder casting a crown of gold before that throne which you will never see.<sup>2</sup>

Men and brethren! I should think by your lives and conversation that you are persuaded that the love of Christ will prevent the everlasting destruction of a single soul, with the solitary exception of the man who has committed the sin against the Holy Ghost.<sup>3</sup> They of old said, "Are there few that be saved?"<sup>4</sup> The Christian of to-day exclaims, "Are there any that will be lost?" And this in the teeth of our blessed Lord's words, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."<sup>5</sup>

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."<sup>6</sup> The dead soul hath no husband in Christ, either in this world or in that which is to come. In the day that she sinned "a sin unto death,"<sup>7</sup> the words of the woman of Samaria were true of

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<sup>1</sup> Church Catechism.

<sup>2</sup> Revelation iv. 4. 10.

<sup>3</sup> S. Matthew xii. 31, 32.

<sup>4</sup> S. Luke xiii. 23.

<sup>5</sup> S. Matthew vii. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Ezekiel xviii. 4.

<sup>7</sup> 1 S. John v. 16.

her, "I have no husband"<sup>1</sup>. That thus it must be, "Ezekiel is unto you a sign."

Follow me "in the Spirit"<sup>2</sup> to the house of death, yet not the house of mourning, by the river of Chebar, and "I will show thee things which must be hereafter."<sup>3</sup> "And at even my wife died."<sup>4</sup> There, in that Chaldean chamber, "ceiled with cedar and painted with vermilion,"<sup>5</sup> cold and still as the sculptured human-headed bulls that looked down upon the bed of ivory and gold, lay "the Desire of his eyes," taken from him by a stroke,<sup>6</sup> and he is left *to live, and move, and have his being*<sup>7</sup> as if no sorrow had touched him. Did then the old life, "as a falling fig from the fig-tree,"<sup>8</sup> fall from him, and the man had no more sense of loss than the tree? Far from it. The very command which forbade the sob of convulsive grief, of the relief of tears, shows how the natural forces were sternly repressed, as with a hand of iron. Before those tearless eyes their Desire passed as if alive; every vanished scene connected with *her* returns; the darker the night gathers over the death chamber the more vividly glares the cold, clear, ideal horizon of the past,

<sup>1</sup> S. John iv. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Revelation i. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Revelation iv. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ezekiel xxiv. 18.

<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah xxii. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Ezekiel xxiv. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Acts xvii. 28.

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah xxxiv. 4.



sharp as it would cut his eye-strings;<sup>1</sup> and when the glorious sun at last filled the chamber with light, and the prophet vested himself in tire and mantle, everything at every turn reminded him of her and of the past. "Bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh," "the Desire of his eyes;" and this was the end of all—the vase of the old time shattered, and the lily of life laid low, soon to be carried to the house of decay and corruption!

Yet "he did in the morning as he was commanded."<sup>2</sup> He forbore to cry; he made no mourning for the dead; he spake unto the people in the morning as if his wife had not died in the evening—as if, as far as he was concerned, it was well with him, and sorrow had not come.

The figure of Ezekiel speaking to the people in the morning on the banks of the Chebar seems to change, even as we gaze, to one like unto the Son of Man, Whose feet stand on the Mount of Olives on the morning of the resur-

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<sup>1</sup> I would have broke mine eye-strings; cracked them, but

To look upon him, till the diminution  
Of space had pointed him sharp as my needle,  
Nay, followed him, till he had melted from  
The smallness of a gnat to air, and then  
Have turn'd mine eye and wept.

*Cymbeline.*

<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel xxiv. 18.

reaction.<sup>1</sup> Before Him are gathered, trooping from the dust and ocean-depths, the dead, small and great. They file off, with strange power and irresistible instinct, right and left. They on the darkling left hold aloft, in an agony of fear, the writing of the covenant of grace, and claim to "have put on Christ"<sup>2</sup> in Holy Baptism; to be espoused to the Lamb in sacramental bridals. They display a marriage certificate. Christ shows them a bill of divorcement, dated at such an hour and on such a day, in which they sinned away their wedlock. The symbol has become a reality. The awful solitude of that night with the dead in far Chaldea was a figure of the "treading the wine-press alone."<sup>3</sup> Its agony without tears, its sensation of a dumb giant struggling in the choking throat, its experience of being forsaken of God, its interior martyrdom, are all representations of what He should suffer Who in His agony and passion took into His consciousness the countless sins of all human kind. As Ezekiel remembered every little circumstance connected with "the Desire of his eyes," when she was lost to them for ever, and forbore to cry or to make mourning for the dead, so in the re-

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<sup>1</sup> Zechariah xiv. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. iii. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah lxiii. 3.

surrection will Christ call to mind how He came to save that which was lost. How He took you, and you, and you, the lost sheep, in His arms, carried you on His shoulders; but you *would* stray from the good Shepherd. I see you leap from Jesu's shoulder, *now, now*, before you leave this church! So the life of the sheepfold has ended, and nothing is left but the sentence, "Depart from Me, ye cursed."<sup>1</sup>

God "hateth putting away."<sup>2</sup> He "will have all men to be saved,"<sup>3</sup> yet if thou—the sheep that *WILL* be lost—wert the signet upon the right hand<sup>4</sup> of Christ, He would pluck thee thence; yea, though ye were the jewels of His crown ye would fall as Satan fell,—like lightning from heaven,<sup>5</sup>—into the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, prepared for the devil and his angels;<sup>6</sup> and Christ forbears to cry, and makes no mourning for the dead, though ye had been "the Desire of His eyes," and had lain in His bosom like the poor man's ewe lamb, and had been unto Him as a daughter.<sup>7</sup>

It is a fearful picture! But as out of the fish's

<sup>1</sup> S. Matthew xxv. 41.    <sup>2</sup> Malach iii. 16.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Tim. ii. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Jeremiah xxii. 24.

<sup>5</sup> S. Luke x. 18.

<sup>6</sup> Rev. xx. 10; S. Mat. xxv. 41.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Samuel xii. 3.

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belly, as out of the belly of hell, was restored a human form,<sup>1</sup>—of him, who was the figure of a greater than himself<sup>2</sup> returning from preaching to the spirits in prison,<sup>3</sup> so out of the terrors of the Lord may you hear the “still small voice” of Him that persuades you to be saved. And may the fear of hell, and the thought of a *tearless* CHRIST, lead you to “consider your ways,” and to presume no longer on the love of Almighty God, Who is “of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity!”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jonah ii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> S. Matthew xii. 41.

<sup>3</sup> 1 S. Peter iii. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Habakkuk i. 13.



